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Students' Cultural Beliefs Toward Mental Health

Alison Claire Hansen, RN, MAdvNursPrac, GCHE

School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine/ Faculty of Health Sciences, Australian Catholic University, North Sydney, Australia

Denise Elizabeth McGarry, BA, RN, CMHN, MPM, GCHE

School of Nursing, Midwifery & Paramedicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, Australian Catholic University, North Sydney, NSW, 2069, Australia

Amanda Johnson, PhD, MstHScEd, DipT(Ng), RN

Australian Catholic University, North Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Michael Roche, PhD, MHSc, BHSc, DipAppSc, MHCert

School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine, Australian Catholic University and Northern Sydney Local Health District, North Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Mental health issues are common. The most recent national survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007) indicates that, of Australians aged 16-85, one in five (20% or 3.2 million) had experienced a mental disorder over the previous 12-months, and almost half (45% or 7.3 million) will experience a mental disorder during their lifetime. People with mental health problems have significant contact with all types of health services (Mather, Roche, & Duffield, 2014), and nurses need the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to care for these people regardless of the setting. Studies in Australia and elsewhere have demonstrated that quality educational and clinical experiences can improve attitudes to mental health nursing (Brunero, Jeon, & Foster, 2012; Happell & Gaskin, 2013; Surgenor, Dunn, & Horn, 2005).

One of the foundations of working effectively with people with mental health problems is the development of a therapeutic alliance (Pitkänen, Hätönen, Kuosmanen, & Välimäki, 2008), which itself is influenced by the beliefs and attitudes of the clinician (Albery et al., 2003; Hughes et al., 2008).

The beliefs and attitudes held by individuals towards mental health problems vary between cultures (Chambers et al., 2010). These beliefs reflect different historical and cultural antecedents. Consequently, these beliefs impact on the understanding of mental health and resultant attitudes, for example by attributing agency to the development of disorder. Findings from an international study on beliefs and attitudes established their impact on how nurses deliver mental health practice (Chambers et al., 2010).

Students undertaking the BN course will provide care for people who experience mental health problems across a range of practice settings. Self-awareness of one's own beliefs and attitudes concerning mental health influences an individual's capacity to achieve therapeutic outcomes for people receiving nursing care (Stein-Parbury, 2013). Central to an undergraduate nursing curriculum is its capacity to provide teaching and learning activities which challenge and remedy fallacious beliefs and attitudes held by students on entering the course.

A systematic integrative review of the topic was undertaken (Whittemore & Knaf, 2005). An electronic search was conducted for the period January 2000 to January 2017. Databases searched included CINAHL Complete, PsycINFO, Medline and Informat. Key words used included attitudes to mental illness, cultural beliefs, undergraduate nursing students, religious beliefs, in combination with mental illness and mental disorder, and were informed by checking suggested subject terms. Secondary searches were conducted by hand examining references lists of identified papers. Inclusion criteria included English language, peer reviewed journal articles, and those addressing attitudes towards mental health problems, services and treatments. Exclusion criteria included those papers addressing attitudes and beliefs of established clinicians.

The above search strategy returned numerous papers. However, when these were examined more closely and different key word combinations applied, the number of papers significantly reduced. Further, application of

exclusion criteria resulted in few papers meeting the criteria for review. Results were tabulated to facilitate comparison and integration of findings.

Findings reiterated the commonality of negative attitudes and beliefs about people with mental health problems and that these attitudes and beliefs are global in nature. Variation was noted between countries of origin, gender and clinical practice area of encounter during study (Hampton & Zhu, 2011; Linden & Kavanagh, 2012). Personal experience of mental health problems was not a significant predictor of attitudes and beliefs (Schafer, Wood, & Williams, 2011).

This paper addresses in detail the findings and ramifications for mental health nursing education design.

Title:

Students' Cultural Beliefs Toward Mental Health

Keywords:

cultural beliefs about mental health, pre-registration/undergraduate nursing students and systematic integrative literature search

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Abstract Summary:

Diverse beliefs systems are characteristic of mental health, both through history and cultures. Educational providers increasingly work with students from internationally diverse backgrounds. This paper describes a systematic integrative literature review that aimed to inform ways to help students of different backgrounds recognise their pre-existing belief systems about mental health.

Content Outline:

The findings of the literature review were explored and their implications for educational design suggested.

First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author

Alison Claire Hansen, RN, MAdvNursPrac, GCHE
Australian Catholic University
School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine/ Faculty of Health Sciences
Lecturer in Nursing
North Sydney
Australia

Professional Experience: Clinical Mental health nursing practice in the area of forensic psychiatric nursing, specifically working with women, and nursing management and education in the clinical and tertiary sectors.

Author Summary: Alison Hansen is a registered nurse who has practiced in the area of forensic psychiatric nursing, specifically working with women. She has taught in various units across all year levels of the Bachelor of Nursing program, including mental health nursing, University Core units focusing on concepts of 'self and community' and issues related to social justice, and a psychology for nurses unit focusing on the person at the centre of the health care experience.

Second Secondary Presenting Author

Corresponding Secondary Presenting Author

Denise Elizabeth McGarry, BA, RN, CMHN, MPM, GCHE
Australian Catholic University
School of Nursing, Midwifery & Paramedicine, Faculty of Health Sciences
Lecturer
North Sydney, NSW
Australia

Professional Experience: Mental health nursing more than 30 years including clinical practice in acute and residential programmes for children, families and older people, management roles in clinical fields at unit and hospital level. Education (25 years) in clinical field and tertiary education.

Author Summary: Denise McGarry is a credentialed mental health nurse who has practiced in the field of mental health nursing for over 30 years. She has taught mental health nursing practice in both the clinical arena and also tertiary education over 25 years. She has published in peer-reviewed journals about a number of research projects and has published chapters in three text books.

Third Author

Amanda Johnson, PhD, MstHScEd, DipT(Ng), RN
Australian Catholic University
Associate Professor & State Head NSW/ACT
North Sydney, New South Wales
Australia

Professional Experience: Dr Johnson has over 25 years experience in nurse education with a focus on undergraduate curriculum design and implementation. In addition to this role she has led unit development in the areas of aged care; palliation and chronic illness and disability both from a teaching and research perspective culminating in these areas now being embedded as core units in curricula. She is also an assessor for other University course accreditation processes.

Author Summary: Dr Johnson is a senior academic currently managing a School of 2,500 students. She engages in research related to older people and palliative care having been successful in competitive grants. She publishes in peer reviewed journals and is the lead editor for a text on Caring for Older People and co-editor for Chronic Illness and Disability. She also leads the development of work related to inherent requirements for students with disability.

Fourth Author

Michael Roche, PhD, MHSc, BHSc, DipAppSc, MHCert
Australian Catholic University and Northern Sydney Local Health District
School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine
Associate Professor
North Sydney, New South Wales
Australia

Professional Experience: Dr Roche has more than a decade of experience in both undergraduate and postgraduate nursing education across mental health nursing, health services management and research subjects, including the coordination of subjects and programs, non-award programs, new program implementation, curriculum development, review and accreditation.

Author Summary: Dr Roche has substantial experience in senior research, academic and nursing positions. He has undertaken local and national research projects in collaboration with health services, non-government organisations, and other bodies. He has published over 50 peer reviewed papers in

addition to numerous reports and presentations. His current research explores the work of mental health drug and alcohol nurses.